

## **40<sup>th</sup> Anniversary of the Larrakia Flag-raising to claim Darwin on 7<sup>th</sup> November 1971.**

Forty years ago today, at three o'clock on a quiet Sunday afternoon, five Aboriginal men from the Kulaluk camp in Coconut Grove raised their flag on the flagpole outside the Darwin Supreme Court in Mitchell Street to claim back Larrakia country. Witnessed by a few waiting journalists, Harry Adams determinedly hauled up the flag as Bobby Secretary announced that, "Just as Captain Cook had raised a flag to claim Australia for the Crown, the Larrakia people were now raising a flag to claim back their land." As the men returned to their suburban camp, the demands of the Larrakia people were being telegraphed around the nation and the world.

As far as the protesters were aware, there was no existing Aboriginal flag. As a symbol of their campaign, they had designed a banner with a red stripe at one end to represent the blood of their people shed since the invasion and a red stripe at the other end to represent the blood of the Larrakia descendants. In the centre was a green-tipped representation of the tree growing on an ancient jungle fowl nesting mound at Kulaluk where meetings to plan the Larrakia resurgence were regularly held. The flag had been sewn by Bill Day's Maori wife, Polly Day, out of scraps of material. It was to feature in several more protests in the coming months, documented in their newsletter "Bunji".

The flag-raising was a significant statement declaring Aboriginal sovereignty that may have been the inspiration for the erection of the Aboriginal Embassy outside Parliament House in Canberra more than two months later, on 26<sup>th</sup> January 1972. Previously, North East Arnhem Land clans and the Gurindji people had made claims for land rights within colonial laws; however, the Larrakia took their claims to another level by proclaiming their sovereign rights, countering similar proclamations by the British in past centuries. Indeed, history proves that if it was not for the ragged band of Aboriginal protesters camped on vacant land around Darwin in the early 1970s, land rights might not be a reality in the Northern Territory today.

As a witness and active participant in those events, particularly the raising of the flag to claim back Larrakia land, on this historic occasion I acknowledge the courage and foresight of those brave men and women. Although their demands are yet to be satisfied, they would be proud to know that today the Larrakia people, numbering over 1600 strong, have won some recognition as the traditional owners of the Darwin area. Before their passing, those who raised the flag in 1971 had at least seen the map of Darwin transformed when their claims to land at Kulaluk, One Mile Dam and Knuckeyes Lagoon were recognised. As they would undoubtedly say today, "Be of good courage, the struggle continues!"

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